



MASTER FILE

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MEMORANDUM FOR Brian Monaghan
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Attention: Decennial Design, Policy and Management Branch

Through: Howard Hogan *Howard Hogan*
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Subject: Observation of Block Canvassing in Alexandria, VA

I. INTRODUCTION

Block Canvassing was conducted in northern Virginia as part of Wave 2 of the Census 2000 Block Canvassing operation. I visited the Alexandria, VA Local Census Office (LCO) and observed parts of the block canvassing operation in nearby Fairfax County, VA, on March 24-25, 1999. More specifically, on March 24, I was given a tour of the Alexandria office and observed a canvasser in the field: on the morning of March 25, I accompanied a crew leader on his rounds.

II. OBSERVATIONS ON MARCH 24-25

On the morning of March 24, I and an observer from another Headquarters division were shown around the Alexandria Local Census (LCO) Office by Steve Caldwell, the Assistant Manager for Field Operations. We then met a canvasser in the field.

The canvasser was very thorough. He was canvassing a main road and a set of cul-de-sacs adjacent to it. Along either side of each road, he would stop at the second house and each third house thereafter. He was consistent in asking all of his questions, first giving the occupant the Privacy Notice with a brief explanation, then asking for verification for the address of that house and the houses on either side. He would then ask about other living quarters in that house and adjacent houses, or anywhere on the street. If a particular structure was observed (such as a sizable shed in back) that seemed to have the potential to be an additional living quarters, he would specifically ask about the structure.

One problem that the canvasser continuously encountered was that the register listed the addresses on the cul-de-sacs as if they were consecutive addresses on the same side of the street. The asterisks indicated, for instance, that he should visit 2401 to verify the addresses on 2400 through 2402, visit 2404 to verify 2403 through 2405, and so forth. Since this would have had him verifying 2400 from a house across the street, he dispensed with the markings in the register in this instance, choosing houses to stop at in the manner described above. If no one was home at a house, he would stop at the next house.

On Thursday morning March 25, I met a crew leader at a McDonalds where he was meeting with four of his canvassers. Some of them had completed books to turn in, which he reviewed with them. They were eager to show me examples of the more problematic situations they had run into, and how they had dealt with them. They showed me places where the odd and even numbers along streets had been reversed, necessitating wholesale deletions in one block and wholesale additions in the block across the street. They pointed out places where shown as a cul-de-sac in one location turned out to be a street through the middle of a nearby block. They also pointed out places where entire new neighborhoods were not on the map. They had drawn corrections on their assignment area maps in a clear manner, in some cases attaching a hand-drawn attachment where added or redrawn streets would have been too substantial or confusing to draw in directly. Where the numbering had been on the wrong sides of the streets, they noted the numbering corrections on the assignment maps as well as on the listing sheets.

On both days the canvassers asked why house numbers were so frequently on the wrong sides of the streets. I explained that I had little familiarity with the problems the geographers encountered in placing house numbers on the proper sides of streets, but that it made me want to know, just for my own understanding.

The canvassers clearly got along well with their crew leader and each other; they enjoyed showing each other their more difficult situations to ascertain that they had handled them in the best possible way.

After the meeting ended, the crew leader dropped off at the LCO the completed book he had reviewed. He took me around to visit some of the more challenging situations his canvassers had run into. There was one situation where the border of the assignment area ran through the middle of a townhouse complex, and the listing sheets had the house numbers on the wrong sides of the street. His canvasser had deleted the addresses that were incorrectly listed, and added the ones that were actually there (that had presumably been listed as being on the other side). The assignment area that included the block across the street was in another crew leader district. The assumption by both the canvasser and the crew leader was that the canvasser on the other side of the line would have had to deal with the same problem in reverse, and they indicated a desire to speak with that canvasser to make sure their work was consistent. The crew leader's comment to the canvasser (and, later, to me) was, "We have to do our job right, and just hope he

does his job right, too." He did not bring up the matter with his Field Operations Supervisor at the LCO to attempt to find out which canvasser or crew leader might have handled the other block.

III. COMMENTS FROM THE ASSISTANT MANAGER FOR FIELD OPERATIONS

When Mr. Caldwell showed us the office on the morning of March 24, he gave us an overview of his successes and difficulties, mentioning in particular:

- A. Due to the exceptionally low unemployment in northern Virginia, he was having a hard time finding enough workers, and was about 30 percent understaffed.
- B. Due to the high educational level of the local workforce, he had an unusually well educated force of canvassers. As a result, they were able to resolve many problems without assistance, turn in books with very few errors (verified by an extremely small number of failed quality assurance checks), and his office was finishing the operation comfortably ahead of schedule, despite the level of understaffing.
- C. His clerical staff spent the overwhelming amount of its time processing daily pay reports. The sheer volume of paper could be reduced drastically if his canvassers could fill out pay reports weekly rather than daily, freeing his clerical staff for other duties.
- D. The pay differentials were causing some tension. Canvassers in Fairfax County earned \$13 per hour, to adjust for the Washington, D.C. area's high cost of living. Meanwhile, the canvassers in adjacent (and fast-growing) Loudoun County had more difficult assignments involving large numbers of adds, but were only getting \$9 per hour. Similarly, canvassers in canvassers, because canvassing rural style blocks with widely separated houses and long the more rural counties had more challenging assignments than the Fairfax County driveways is slow and time-consuming.

IV. CONCLUSION

On the whole, my impression was that the Alexandria office was well run, and the people I observed appeared to do their jobs very well. I have no recommendations at this time.

cc: DSSD Census 2000 Procedures and Operations Memorandum Series
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